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CTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

3 October 1973

Dear Admiral:

Responding to your letter of September 25th, I am initially approaching COINS with two steps in mind. Most immediately I want to satisfy myself that I have developed a sound basis for making the judgments that lie ahead. To do this, I am now selecting an experienced individual from CIA and have asked the ASD(I) to supply another. These two individuals will be charged with making a prompt assessment for me of what is feasible relative to a larger-scale community system, the capabilities it might have, and the costs it might incur. I do not intend to re-do the so-called Malkin study, but I feel the need for a fairly current assessment that will put things in my frame of reference.

Pending the results of this survey -- with which I expect to understand the essence of the problem -- I am open-minded as to the future architecture and overall concept for COINS. I believe certain technical upgrading is immediately possible, and Dr. Hall and I are moving to make initial commitments that will realize benefits for system users in the short run. Given the severe budget squeeze that faces us, I have yet to determine how much further it is effective to go in building a sophisticated on-line system. The need for COINS, as a communication network, to interface with DoD's IDHS and WWMCCS, raises technical problems in which the intelligence community does not have full freedom to determine solutions.

There is an areas, however, where we can make immediate progress. We will improve files now in COINS and set standards for those that are placed in the system in the relatively near future. Here, I have undertaken a number of specific actions, along the following lines:

-- File content and coverage. I am now taking steps to involve the substantive USIB committees in working with the USIB Intelligence Information Handling Committee (IHC) to validate community need for particular kinds of data and to provide guidance on the content, coverage and format of files. For example, if COINS were to include a new file on the subject of nuclear energy, JAEIC should be involved in providing insights on behalf of potential users. The Intelligence Community (IC) Staff also has a responsibility in the matter of file content.

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-- File completeness. A survey is now underway by the IC Staff to illustrate and characterize the security and dissemination restrictions that must be dealt with to make data in COINS files more complete and accessible throughout the community. Based on the results of this survey, which I expect to have in hand within two weeks, we will begin an orderly examination of this problem using the USIB Security Committee.

-- User assistance. I am asking that the interagency Data Base Working Group make, as a regular part of its survey of files for COINS, an examination of the adequacy of cross-reference notations and user instructions contained in the files. Where worthwhile improvements can be made, we will modify the programs that produce data for users.

-- File reliability. Upon completion of the assessment that I mentioned at the outset, I expect to share the results of that survey with USIB members. At that time I will ask them to accept specific responsibilities for producing and maintaining certain COINS files and for assuring their accuracy and completeness.

-- Analytical content. The IC Staff is now testing, for use in crisis and warning situations, the rapid exchange of current intelligence in a national operations and intelligence watch officers network running among the Washington area command centers. Watch officer bulletins might prove a worthwhile addition to COINS files. I am particularly interested in this project because it could take us one more step in expanding the on-line use of formatted intelligence materials for a somewhat more sophisticated user than the average COINS user at present.

I reactivated the USIB Intelligence Information Handling Committee which had been dormant since the retirement of General Robert Taylor last March. I have instructed the new incumbent to take energetic action to carry out DCID responsibilities that bear on the steady upgrading of COINS. In another direction, you will find that the Objectives for the Intelligence Community, which I forwarded to the President on September 6th, and which as you know he has approved, include actions that could result in the development of a number of new data files and arrays. If any of these appear appropriate for COINS, we will, I think, be able to recognize this at the outset of our planning and take advantage of the opportunity.

W. E. Colby

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